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SWADESHI

BY

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BEING A LECTURE DELIVERED AT THE MISSIONARY CONFERENCE, MADRAS

SONS OF INDIA, Ltd.,
10, ESPLANADE, MADRAS.

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SWADESHI

It was not without much diffidence that I undertook to speak to you at all. And I was hard put to it in the selection of my subject. I have chosen a very delicate and difficult subject. It is delicate because of the peculiar views I hold upon Swadeshi and it is difficult because I have not that command of language which is necessary for giving adequate expression to my thoughts. I know that I may rely upon your indulgence for the many shortcomings you will no doubt find in my address the more so when I tell you that there is nothing in what I am about to say, that I am not either already practising or am not preparing to practise to the best of my ability. It encourages me to observe that last month you devoted a week to prayer in the place of an address. I have earnestly prayed that what I am about to say may bear fruit and I know that you will bless my word with a similar prayers.

After much thinking I have arrived at a definition of Swadeshi that perhaps best illustrates my meaning. Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of more remote. Thus as for religion, in order to satisfy the requirements of the definition, I must restrict myself to my ancestral religion. That is the use of my immediate religious surroundings. If I find it defective, I should serve it by purging it of its defects. In the domain of politics, I should make use

of the indigenous institutions and serve them by curing them of their proved defects. In that of economics, I should use only things that are produced by my immediate neighbours and serve those industries by making them efficient and complete where they might be found wanting. It is suggested that such Swadeshi reduced to practise will lead to the millennium. And as we do not abandon our pursuit after the millennium, because we do not expect quite to reach it within our time, so may we not abandon Swadeshi even though it may not be fully attained for generations to come.

Let us briefly examine the three branches of Swadeshi as sketched above. Hinduism has become a conservative religion and therefore a mighty force because of the Swadeshi spirit underlying it. It is the most tolerant because it is non-proselytising, and as capable of expansion to-day as it has been found to be in the past. It has succeeded not in driving as I think it has been erroneously held, but in absorbing Buddhism. By reason of the Swadeshi spirit, a Hindu refuses to change his religion not necessarily because he considers it to be the best but because he knows that he can complement it by introducing reforms. And what I have said about Hinduism is, I suppose, true of the other great faiths of the world, only it is held that it is specially so in the case of Hinduism. But here comes the point I am labouring to reach. If there is any substance in what I have said, will not the great missionary bodies of India to whom she owes a deep debt of gratitude for what they have done and are doing, do still better and serve the spirit of Christianity better by dropping the goal of proselytising, but continuing that philanthropic work? I hope you will not consider this to be an impertinence on my part. I make the

suggestion in all sincerity and in humility. Moreover, I have some claim upon your attention. I have endeavoured to study the Bible. I consider it as part of my scriptures. The spirit of the Sermon on the Mount competes almost on equal terms with the Bhagavat Gita for the domination of my heart. I yield to no Christian in the strength of devotion with which I sing "Lead kindly light," and several other inspired hymns of a similar nature. I have come under the influence of noted Christian missionaries belonging to different denominations. And I enjoy to this day the privilege of friendship with some of them. You will perhaps therefore allow that I have offered the above suggestion, not as a biassed Hindu but as a humble and impartial student of religion with great learnings towards Christianity. May it not be that "Go Ye Unto All The World" message has been somewhat narrowly interpreted and the spirit of it misses? It will not be denied, I speak from experience, that many of the conversions are only so-called. In some cases, the appeal has gone not to the heart but to the stomach. And in every case a conversion leaves a sore behind it which, I venture to think, is avoidable. Quoting again from experience, a new birth, a change of heart, is perfectly possible in every one of the great faiths. I know I am now treading upon this ice. But I do not apologise, in closing this part of the subject, for saying that the frightful outrage that is just going on in Europe perhaps shows that the message of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Peace, had been little understood in Europe, and that light upon it may have to be thrown from the East.

I have sought your help in religious matters, if it is yours to give in a special sense. But I makebold to

seek it even in political matters. I do not believe that religion has nothing to do with politics. The latter divorced from religion is like a corpse only fit to be buried. As a matter of fact, in your own silent manner you influence politics not a little. And I feel that if the attempt to separate politics from religion had not been made as it is even now made, they would not have re-generated as they often appear to do. No one consider-ed that the political life of the country is in a happy state. Following out the Swadeshi spirit, I observe the indigenous institutions and the village panchayats hold me. India is really a republican country and it is because of that that it has survived every shock hitherto delivered. Princes and potentates, whether they were Indian-born or foreigner, have hardly touched the vast masses except for collecting revenue. The latter in their turn seem to have rendered unto Cesar what was Caesar's and for the rest have done much as they have liked. The vast organisation of caste answered not only the religious wants of the community but it ans-wered to its political needs. The villagers managed their internal affairs through the caste system, and through it they dealt with any oppression from the ruling power or powers. It is not possible to deny that was capable of producing the caste system and its wonderful power of organisation. One had but to attend the great Kumbha Mela at Hardwar last year to know how skillful that organisation must have been which, without any seeming effort, was able to effectively cater for more than a million pilgrims. Yet it is the fashion to say that we lack organising ability. This is true, I fear, to a certain extent, of those who have been nurtured in the new traditions. We have laboured under a terrible handicap owning to an almost fatal departure from the

Swadeshi spirit. We, the educated classes, have received our education through a foreign tongue. We have therefore not reached upon the masses. We want to represent the masses, but we fail. They recognise us not much more than they recognise the English officers. Their hearts are an open book to neither. The aspirations are not ours. Hence there is a break. And you witness not in reality failure to organise but want of correspondence between the representatives and the represented. If, during the last fifty years, we had been educated through the vernaculars, our elders and our servants and our neighbours would have partaken of our knowledge; the discoveries of a Bose or a Ray would have been household treasures as are the Ramayan and the Mahabharat. As it is, s cfar as the masses are concerned, those great discoveries might as well have been made by foreigners. Had instruction in all the branches of learning been given through the vernaculars, I make bold to say that they would have been enriched wonderfully. The question of village sanitation, etc., would have been solved long ago. The village panchayats would be now a living force in a special way, and India would almost be enjoying Self-Government suited to its requirements and would have been spared the humiliating spectacle of organised assassination on its sacred soil. It is not too late to mend. And you can help if you will, as no other body or bodies can.

And now for the last division of Swadeshi. Much of the deep poverty of the masses is due to the ruinous departure from Swadeshi in the economic and industrial life. If not an article of commerce had been brought from outside India, we should be to-day a land flowing with milk and honey. But that was not to be. We were greedy and so was England. The connection

between England and India was based clearly upon an error. But she does not remain in India in error. It is her declared policy that India is to be held in trust for the people. If this be true, Lancashire must stand aside. And if the Swadeshi doctrine is a sound doctrine, Lancashire can stand aside without hurt though it may sustain a shock for the time being. I think of Swadeshi not as a boycott movement undertaken by way of revenge. I conceive it as a religious principle to be followed by all. I am no economist, but I have read some treatises which show that England could easily become a self-sustained country, growing all the produce she needs. This may be an utterly ridiculous proposition, and perhaps the best proof that it cannot be true is, that England is one of the largest importers in the world. But India cannot live for Lancashire or any other country before she is able to live for herself. And she can live for hereself only if she produces and is helped to produce everything for her requirements within her own borders. She need not be, she ought not to be drawn into the vortex of mad and ruinous competition which breeds fratricide, jealousy and many other evils. But who is to stop her great millionairies from entering into the world competition? Certainly not legislation. Force of public opinion, proper education, however, can do a great deal in the desired direction. The handloom industry is in dying condition. I took special care during my wanderings last year to see as many weavers as possible, and my heart ached to find how they had lost, how families had retired from this once flourishing and honourable occupation. If we follow the Swadeshi doctrine, it would be your duty and mine to find out neighbours who can supply our wants and to teach them

to supply them where they do not know how to, assuming that there are neighbours who are in want of healthy occupation. Then every village of India will almost be a self-supporting and self-contained unit, exchanging only such necessary commodities with other villages where they are not locally producible. This may all sound nonsensical, to parch one's throat with thirst when a kindly Mahomedan is ready to offer pure water to drink. And yet thousands of Hindus would rater die of thirst than drink water from a Mohamedan household. These nonsensical men can also, once they are convinced that their religion demands that they should wear garments manufactured in India only and eat food only grown in India, decline to wear any other clothing or eat any other food. Lord Curzon set the fashion for tea-drinking, and the pernicious drug now bids fair to overwhelm the nation. It has already undermined the digestive apparatus of hundreds of thousands of men and of women and constitutes an additional tax upon their slender purses. Lord Hardinge can set the fashion for Swadeshi and almost the whole of India will forswear foreign goods. There is a verse in Bhagavat Gita which, freely rendered, means masses follow the classes. It is easy to undo the evil if the thinking portion of the community were to take the Swadeshi Vow even though it may for a time cause a considerable inconvenience. I hate legislative interference in any department of life. At best it is the lesser evil. But I would tolerate, welcome indeed, plead for a stiff protective duty upon foreign goods. Natal, a British Colony, protected its sugar by taking the sugar that came from another British Colony, Mauritius. England has sinned against India by forcing free trade upon her. It may have been food for her, but it has been poison for this country.

It has often been urged that India cannot adopt Swadeshi in the economic life at any rate. Those who advance this objection do not look upon Swadeshi as a rule of life. With them, it is a more patriotic effort, not to be made if it involved any self-denial. Swadeshi, as defined here, is a religious discipline to be undergone in utter disregard of the physical discomfort it may cause to individuals. Under its speed the deprivation of a pin or a needle because these are not manufactured in India need cause no terror. A Swadeshist will learn to do without hundreds of things which to-day he considers necessary. Moreover, those who dismiss the Swadeshi from their minds by arguing the impossible forget that Swadeshi after all is a goal to be reached by steady effort. And we would be making for the goal even if we confined Swadeshi to a given set of articles allowing ourselves as a temporary measure to use such things as might not be procurable in this country.

There now remains for me to consider one more objection that has been raised against Swadeshi. The objectors consider it to be a selfish doctrine without any warrant in the civilised code of morality. With them to practise Swadeshi is to revert to barbarism. I cannot enter into a detailed analysis of the proposition. But I would urge that Swadeshi is the only doctrine consistent with the law of humanity and love. It is arrogance to think of launching out to serve the whole of India when I am hardly able to serve even my own family. It were better to concentrate my effort upon the family and consider that through them I was serving the whole nation, and, if you will, the whole of the humanity. This is humility and it is love. The motive will determine the quality of the act. I may serve my family regardless of the suffering I may cause

to others, as, for instance, I may accept an employment which enables me to extort money from people. I enrich myself thereby and then satisfy many unlawful demands of the family. Here I am neither serving the family nor the state. Or I may recognise that God has given me hands and feet only to work with for my sustenance and for that of those who may be dependent upon me. I would then at once simplify my life and that of those whom I can directly reach. In this instance, I would have served the family without causing injury to any one else. Supposing that everyone followed this mode of life, we would have at once an ideal state. All will not reach that state at the same time. But those of us who, realising its truth, enforce it in practice will clearly anticipate and accelerate the coming of that happy date. Under this plan of life in seeming to serve India to the exclusion of every other country, I do not harm any other country. My patriotism is both exclusive and inclusive. It is exclusive in the sense that in all humility I confine my affection to the land of my birth, that it is inclusive in the sense that my service is not of a competitive or antagonistic nature. *Sic utere tuo ut alienum non leed* is not merely a legal maxim, but it is a grand doctrine of life. It is the key to proper practice of Ahimsa or love. It is for you, the custodians of a great faith, to set the fashion and show by your preaching sanctified by practice, that patriotism based on "hatred killeth" and that patriotism based on "love giveth life."

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